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JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND  
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Iraq, Lebanon, Danish  
Cartoons, Pressure on Syria, HAMAS, Iraq, Iran (2/14)

11. Summary: Syrian papers reported that Vice President Shara has informed Moqtada al-Sadr, Leader of the al-Sadr movement in Iraq, about Syria's decision to restore diplomatic relations with Iraq and exchange diplomatic representation at level of ambassadors after the formation of the new Iraqi government. During his meeting with al-Sadr, Shara expressed Syria's hope that this step would be a starting point for advancing the march of development and enhancing bilateral relations in all fields. Talks also dealt with developments in Iraq that accompanied the political process in different areas and their impact on the security situation. "Syrian-Iraqi relations will be improved in the forthcoming period to serve the interests of both sisterly countries," Al-Sadr told reporters following his meeting with Shara. Al-Sadr also reiterated the importance of ending the occupation of Iraq.

Syrian papers featured statements by Lebanese figures and parties on the first anniversary of the Al-Hariri assassination. Papers reported a statement by President Lahoud confirming Lebanese insistence on exposing the truth and calling on all Lebanese to rise above political trivialities. Headlines also featured a statement by the "Amal Movement" calling upon all Lebanese to prevent politicization of the crime, and emphasizing that Rafik al-Hariri's "Arabness" constituted the main motive for supporting the Lebanese national resistance. "The resistance is a Lebanese necessity to face the Israeli occupation and deepen Lebanon's role in Arab issues particularly the Palestinian cause," the statement said.

End summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Vice-President Shara discusses with Iraqi clergyman Moqtada al-Sadr latest developments in the Iraqi arena. Shara: Syria will restore all its diplomacy relations with Iraq after its government is formed." (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/14)

"Dr. Faisal Mekdad, Syria's Permanent Representative to the UN, sends a letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan clarifying Syria's measures to protect diplomatic missions and calls on the

international community to confront the campaign against symbols of the divine religions. Mekdad: Syria is committed to international agreements and regrets statements by some officials from other countries" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/14)

"Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen dismisses some Moslem community representatives from talks on the cartoons crisis. Oglo [Chairman of the Organization of Islamic Conference] calls on the EU to enact legislation." (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/14)

"Extensive Lebanese anger over suspicions about the arms of the national resistance and the Lebanese identity of the Shebaa Farms. Israel joins the provocation. Lahoud calls for rising above political trivialities" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/14).

"HAMAS rejects the latest decisions on expanding authorities of the Head of the Palestinian Authority. A Palestinian woman was killed in southern Gaza. Israeli occupation isolates the West Bank from the al-Aghwar area. Olmert recommends demarcation of borders as a first mission for the new Knesset. HAMAS links ending resistance with full Israeli withdrawal" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/14)

"11 US soldiers were killed or injured in Iraq and Afghanistan" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/14)

"Iran resumes nuclear enrichment research. Russian talks between cancellation and postponement" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/14)

### 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"That Is Why Syria Is Targeted"

"Syria knows what it wants. It realizes why it is being targeted in this hysterical way. It has its national and pan-Arab principles, while they have their own opposing plans. The difference between the two positions is clear. Syria adheres to its national rights, primarily the restoration of all its occupied territories. It also adheres to its pan-Arab principles with regard to Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and the entire Arab world. In these national and pan-Arab issues, Syria never bargains no matter what the circumstances....

"On the other side, there are American and Israel plans for occupation, hegemony, and the establishment of the so-called 'Greater Middle East', which would fragment the Arab countries, undermine Arabism, and fight Islam and Muslims. Syria cannot accept this. It totally rejects it. And it is working to foil it in cooperation with its brothers and friends. This is why they target Syria...."

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"Why All Fuss About the Russian Initiative?"

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Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (2/14): "President Putin said nothing but the truth when he said that Russia never considered HAMAS a terrorist organization and called on others to respect the will of the Palestinian people, who elected HAMAS in free election....

"The United States does not want anyone in the world to disagree with its policy and judgments, even if this policy and these judgments are absolutely wrong and based on lies and deception."

"Syria took a courageous position when President Asad received HAMAS Political Bureau Chief Khalid Mishaal and congratulated him on HAMAS's election victory.

"Will Arabs grasp the significance of the Syrian and Russian positions and offer support for and open up to HAMAS -- and it is more natural for them than others to adopt this position given the pan-Arab dimension of the conflict and the Palestinian question -- to make the United States, Israel, and the countries moving in their orbit understand that the time of political and intellectual stereotyping of the world has gone....?"

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"The Policy of Extinguishing Fires?"

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Dr. Buthaina Shaban, Expatriate Affairs Minister, commented (2/14): "The incidents that followed the publication of the Danish cartoons revealed the fact that the world today lacks a conscious political and moral leadership, which can steer the ship in a wise and conscious manner. They have also revealed that one of the causes of this shortcoming in today's world is the fact that the superpowers focus on money and the economy and show disregard for the cultural, religious, and spiritual identities of people. This is how some western leaders, including the Danish prime minister and EU leaders, and the United States, reacted to the sweeping Muslim anger in all parts of the world at the harsh insult to a noble prophet. They dealt with the matter in a superficial way, which did not address the core of the problem. They went back to the old method of leveling accusations at forces or countries that are unwelcome in the new age of globalization...."

"It was strange that other western newspapers republished the abusive cartoons in an act of solidarity with Denmark for insulting Muslims and their prophet. It was also strange that Danish Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen bragged about having received a call from Bush, who expressed solidarity with Denmark. We do not know if this was a show of solidarity with Denmark for insulting the last of the prophets or for the adoption in the west of a new policy of religious and cultural racism against Islam and Muslims, in a new manifestation of the western traditional hatred for others.... US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reached the strangest conclusion, namely, that 'there is no justification for the violence that took place in the world in protest against the satirical cartoons'....!"

"It is clear that the US Secretary of State's deep contempt for the sentiments of Muslims all over the world is what prompted her to publicly make light of their feelings toward their prophet in this manner. She and other western leaders have not seen the magnitude of the insult every Muslim felt as a result of the sense of racial superiority, which continues to govern Western culture...."

"We therefore believe that the Western leaders who focus on

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controlling others' oil, manufacturing weapons, and kindling wars do nothing more than make hollow statements to put fires out here and there. But the flames of the fires will not subside unless the policies of racial superiority are reformed on sound moral bases, including respect for people's sentiments, identities, cultures, and religions, and for their security and peace."

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"Motives Behind Hugh's Mission"

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Charles Kamilah, an op-ed writer in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (2/14): "Karen Hughes, the White House's public diplomacy officer, will soon begin the second stage of her tour in the Middle East in an attempt to wash off American sins and mistakes and improve the image of the US policy...."

"Hughes failed in the full sense of the word in the first stage of her mission.... Washington does not need someone to improve its image. What it needs is to change its political discourse and stop being an unfair state.... Washington needs to adopt a balanced policy, renounce war plans, and admit a crushing defeat in an illegitimate war...."

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